United Nations A/56/697

General Assembly

Distr.: General
11 December 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session
Agenda item 119 (b)
Human rights questions: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Letter dated 11 December 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Cambodia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to draw your attention to the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights in Cambodia (A/56/209), which was transmitted by you to the General Assembly. In addition to my statement issued on 12 November 2001 at the thirty-seventh meeting of the Third Committee and at this late hour in the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, I wish to register some comments as follows:

I very much regret to inform you that the said report, as indicated in its summary, is absolutely misleading and full of innuendo, when it states that "four fundamental evils, all closely interrelated, continue to affect Cambodian society; poverty, violence, corruption and lawlessness". That depiction of Cambodian society is far from the truth and unacceptable to any objective observers, including the diplomatic corps and hundreds of NGOs working in Cambodia. Cambodia today is waging a war against poverty, and has made great strides towards its overall stability. With the final demise of the Khmer Rouge, we have finally reached political stability. With the acceleration of the country's economic growth and building up of a strong foundation for sustainable development and long-term economic growth, we are aiming to reach macroeconomic stability. The economic growth, political stability and progress in the areas of human rights and democracy are quite evident to the international community. Cambodia is now a fast emerging nation, firmly on the path to democracy and the rule of law, and is an honourable member of the United Nations, and of regional and international organizations. It may be one of the poorest countries but it is far from being a lawless country. Those are very serious allegations and are unacceptable. There is no excuse for highly paid United Nations staff to make offensive remarks at the expense of a United Nations Member State since no one holds the holy right to make judgement. It is also clear that this is a report on the human rights situation in a country in the process of development. But the right to development and the right to security are also human

01-69155 (E) 141201

rights, and it is disturbing to note that the Special Representative chose to ignore the achievement of the Royal Government of Cambodia in that regard. I am sure that if he cared to read twice the draft report submitted to him, especially after his several high-profile visits to Cambodia, he would not have branded Cambodia as a lawless country.

Paragraphs 27 and 28 of the report are completely misleading. They give the impression that the Royal Government of Cambodia is a very barbaric Government. The fact is that the Royal Government has tried to provide productive land to farmers and offer them land title ownership, wherever available. Under that scheme, before making it available to farmers, the Government has taken care to clear the land of potential landmines and unexploded ordnance. To ensure the absolute safety of the Special Representative during his visit to the site, local authorities took care to double-check his footpath by sending an advance mine-clearing team that he saw with his own eyes. It is beyond our imagination even to think that any responsible Government would deport its own people to live in mined areas and would not care for the safety and living conditions of its own people. The disinformation contained in the report was received with disbelief by all in Cambodia, and that was made known to the Special Representative during his recent visit to Cambodia.

It is hoped that the Special Representative has been satisfied by the official explanation provided to him at the highest level of Government and by the fact that the Royal Government of Cambodia has certainly a higher sense of responsibility than the Special Representative implied. There is much more misleading disinformation contained in his very long report, prepared by his devoted team. But I will not abuse your time to clarify every distortion and exaggeration, or the concerns over the fictional events that have yet to occur in Cambodia, as detailed in the said report.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to you and the United Nations for your kind assistance to the people of Cambodia, and to assure you of the Royal Government's willingness to always cooperate with the United Nations in every way possible.

I would be most grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as an official document of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 119 (b).

I have taken the liberty of sending a copy of the present letter to Ms. Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

(*Signed*) **Ouch** Borith
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative